

I also plan to introduce a piece of legislation called the Job Protection Initiative Act in the coming weeks that will bring much needed structured assistance to the energy industry which has been hit by spontaneous negative market activity.

My initiative will trigger faster governmental response to mass layoffs and will encourage employers to use Federal and State resources that are available to them already by requiring that the Secretary of Labor establish an office to monitor job layoffs across the United States, authorizing \$500 million to be used to help private companies establish lifelong learning programs for their employees, and give the Secretary of Labor the authority to officially recognize those businesses that cooperate with the government to minimize the damage that their layoffs cause.

Although the support of many of our Members of Congress will be needed in order to pass this initiative, I expect that all Members will be able to relate to times when industries that reside in their districts struggled in similar crises and support these efforts.

As one of the representatives of those who work in the energy arena, the oil and gas arena, I realized that it is difficult to be a victim of a certain industry's downfall in these good times. Someone needs to listen, and so we must listen to those voices of individuals who support their family who are now being laid off because of the down trend in the energy industry and of course the low cost of oil per barrel.

This helps the consumer, and we want to continue to help the consumer, but we also need to help our workers. I hope that my colleagues in Congress will see the benefit of also paying attention to those individuals who suffer layoffs even in this good economy.

I would expect my legislation to be offered in the next couple of weeks. Mr. Speaker, I ask for your support and all of my colleagues so that we can respond to the working men and women of America who keep the engine of this economy going when they most need us in their time of need.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. PAUL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. PAUL addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. PALLONE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

#### RENEW COMMITMENT TO BRING FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY TO ENSLAVED PEOPLE IN CUBA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentle-

woman from Florida (Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, tomorrow we commemorate 3 years since the Castro dictatorship indiscriminately killed four young men, three of them American citizens, when two Cuban MIGs shot down their aircraft over international waters while they were on a humanitarian mission.

Three years after the cold blooded murder of Pablo Morales, Carlos Costa, Armando Alejandro, and Mario de la Pena, the Castro dictatorship continues its brutal reign of terror over the Cuban people, and in fact it has intensified this attack.

Just last week, the rubber stamp Cuban National Assembly approved a new law that punishes with 15 years in prison or more anyone on the island who promotes information that the totalitarian regime considers to be counter-revolutionary.

This measure outlaws "the supply, search or gathering of information" and bans "the collaboration directly or through third parties, with radio and television stations, newspapers, magazines, and other mass media" that do not follow the lines of the Castro regime.

The new law is aimed at silencing the increasing number of dissidents, of independent journalists, and of human rights activists who are fighting day in and day out for freedom and democracy in my native homeland of Cuba.

These activists are a main source of information to the international community on the human rights violations that occur in Cuba. They literally put their lives on the line to let the world know of the repression imposed on the Cuban people. Because of their effectiveness, the regime has initiated an all out crackdown against them.

According to the International Press Institute, "Cuban authorities routinely threaten, arrest and jail journalists, often attempting to persuade them to leave the country."

One persecuted independent journalist, Juan Tellez Rodriguez, recently said of the Castro regime that "The government in Havana continues to close itself off to the world, it is deaf to the cries of the international community and it insists on its closed, oppressive political system." He continues saying "It does not even open to its own people, who suffer and die slowly."

Castro himself has made it clear that he has no intention of implementing any type of democratic reform in Cuba.

Earlier this year, the Cuban tyrant reiterated his commitment to socialism or death and claimed "I still speak the same, dress the same and think the same." Oh, yes, we know this.

The last few weeks have been particularly busy for Castro and his thugs. For example, on January 5, pro human rights activist, Ernesto Colas Garcia, was detained, threatened, and beaten by Castro's thugs when returning home from a human rights organization meeting.

On January 14, five dissidents, among them, Rolando Munoz Yyobre and Ofelia Nardo, were detained while on their way to attend a peaceful march in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr.

On January 20, Cuban independent journalist, Jesus Diaz Hernandez, was sentenced to 4 years in jail for dangerous social behavior for his reporting of human rights abuses. Sadly, under the new law imposed by the dictator, the next independent journalist like Jesus Diaz Hernandez will not be sentenced to 4 years but rather at least 15 years in prison.

Just this morning, The Miami Herald reports that Dr. Oscar Eliaz Biscet, of the Lawton Foundation for Human Rights, a leading dissident group on the island, was arrested after participating in an event to commemorate the third anniversary of the regime's massacre of the Brothers to the Rescue pilots. Dr. Biscet had been previously detained and arrested for pro-democracy activities.

Mr. Speaker, the Clinton administration should wake up and take notice before it continues weakening U.S. policy toward Castro, because the dictator has no intention of loosening up his grip on power. Flirting with the dictator through easing of sanctions will not work. And certainly no baseball game or rock musical concert will bring freedom to Cuba either.

The United States should not reward Castro for his repression. Doing so would be unconscionable.

Let us remember the four brave young men who were killed by Castro's thugs just 3 years ago, Pablo Morales, Carlos Costa, Armando Alejandro, and Mario de la Pena. In their names and in the names of so many others who are victims of Castro oppression, let us renew our commitment to help bring freedom and democracy to the enslaved people of Cuba.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. WOOLSEY addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

#### HMO REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from Washington (Mr. BAIRD) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. BAIRD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today along with many Members of my fellow freshman Democrats to address an issue that is central for the citizens of our country and to our State.

As many of us have just finished long campaigns, we are firsthand in touch with the needs of the people of this country, and one of those crying needs is clearly the need for HMO reform.

We are here today to talk about that issue and to talk about what we can do